

Flora of the Verbano

The climate

In the areas bordering the lakes Maggiore and Orta, there is the domain of what they call the "insubric flora", a name that derives from "insubric region" to which the two lakes belong, which begins where the wide basins of the pre-alpine lakes, between hills, plains and mountains, open up.

It is not a geographical expression based on solid historical bases nor on rigorous scientific bases but expresses a form of landscape with an almost Mediterranean imprint.

Historically, Insubria should indicate the occupied territory towards the 5th century BC from the Insubri, Celtic population originally from Gaul, which is extended from the Alps to the river Adda.

The influence on the climate exerted by the great lakes has effects not only along their banks but also enters deeply into the surrounding valleys.

The vegetation has a Mediterranean imprint, especially as regards the two great lakes Maggiore and Orta where even Mediterranean species are flanked by Atlantic species of oceanic climate.

The olive, the lemons and the laurel grow well. The olive tree, around Lake Maggiore, reaches 300 meters above sea level (in the past the olive tree grew only very very close to the lake).

It is also called the "climate of the camellias", which thrive in the beautiful gardens together with an impressive wealth of plants with large flowers, with bright leaves, such as **magnolias, lauraceae, rhododendrons and azaleas.**

Camellia



Rhododendron



Azaleastrum



But what characterizes the flora of Insubria, is the spontaneous vegetation along the shores: **the yew plant, holly and holm oak** (originally from Tuscany).

Probably also due to the continuous warming of the atmosphere there is a gradual expansion of the area in which the insubric flora is present.

There is an obvious increase in evergreen plants at the expense of deciduous plants. **Ivy, laurel, holly, myrtle, Japanese medlar**, both indigenous and exotic, are invading colder Alpine areas. Once the undisputed domain of the chestnut of the hilly belt.

This phenomenon, evident for about twenty years, is called "laurofilization".

After all, the climate of Lake Maggiore was known for its pleasure from the time of **Petrarch**, which called it "saluberrimo".

The large water mass, in fact plays a mitigating role on the climate; annual thermal excursions are contained and the average summer and winter temperatures are respectively lower and higher than in the lowland areas.

Early in the morning on the lake, a gentle breeze called "tramontana" blows, which brings fresh air towards the plain; in the afternoon in the opposite direction, from the plains to the mountains, the "Inverna" blows.

Thanks to this mild and rainy microclimate, the shores of the lake are home to a very rich flora of Mediterranean and exotic species that can be admired in the sumptuous gardens of the villas, gardens of international fame.

To the point that the area around Lake Maggiore has been dubbed the Garden of Europe, due to the wealth of its flowers and plants from all over the world, not to mention all the floriculture nurseries.

Unfortunately in recent years there has been a continuous slow drying up of the climate that is beginning to worry.

Climbing up the valleys towards the high mountains, on the other hand, there is a typically alpine climate with colder temperatures.

Flora and gardens of the Verbano

Lake Maggiore, formerly called Verbano, accumulates heat reserves in the summer, softening the temperature of the winter months and determining the favorable climate conditions of the region.

Precisely for this happy heat exchange between land and water the climate of the area, up to the surrounding hill slopes is mild, even with seasonal variations, throughout the year. This climate is characterized above all by the constant behavior of its meteorological components that always show modest oscillations with considerably milder winters and fewer hot summers compared to other regions of equal altitude and latitude.

This favorable climate allowed the creation and maintenance of a thick vegetation. Many people have thus easily created botanical gardens both in private villas and in public parks. Acidophilous plants such as azaleas, camellias and rhododendrons flourish here and, over the last few years, have allowed the area's floriculture to reach ever-increasing market positions thanks to exports to many European countries, in particular Germany.

The azalea (*Azaleastrum*) is in first place among the typical flowers of Lake Maggiore with many specimens produced annually. It is a shrub of oriental origin acclimatized in this environment since the nineteenth century. It is a rustic and very long-lived plant whose root system can be reduced; azalea is ideal for growing in pots and has a very wide color range. The classical plant has a compact globe and is also enriched with specimens grown in the shape of a pyramid or a sapling..



Azaleastrum

The **camellia** is a plant that has found a great reputation in the nineteenth century thanks to the novel "The Lady of the Camellias".

It is a shrub or small tree characterized by a beautiful foliage, particularly shiny and bright, appreciated for its resistance. Native to China and Japan, it has assumed a predominant role among the acidophilous plants in the West: there are numerous enthusiasts or cameliophiles and as many expert breeders who have created many local hybrids since the nineteenth century. The plant has many colors and shapes. It blooms at the beginning of spring with the opening of the conserved swollen buds throughout the winter.

Some exhibitions at the beginning of spring on the island Bella and in Cannero, exhibitions that attract many tourists even from outside the region, are dedicated to the camellia.

The name **Rhododendron** derives from the Greek rhodon = rose and dendron = tree, hence the tree of roses. Its origin is very old: fragments of this plant have been recovered in China and in the Caucasus; however, the first written information dates back to the sixteenth century. In Europe this flower came only in the nineteenth century; English botanists began to produce hybrid species. Because of the fragility of its flowers, the rhododendron is called "fragile enchantment"; some believe it is the emblem of the first declaration of love. Its flowering takes place in late spring and manifests itself with an amazing effluvium of colors with a variety of pastel shades. The hybridization and genetic improvement work has led to a wide selection of varieties ensuring a perfect setting as garden or potted plants.



Camellia



Rhododendron

Another very particular plant is the **Araucaria** comprising about fifteen species of conifers originating in the southern hemisphere. Some species are rustic and can be grown outdoors (such as the *Araucaria araucana*). Others are delicate and must be grown in greenhouses or in apartments (eg *Araucaria excelsa*). This plant is particular because it differs in male and female individuals.

The most famous gardens in the area are certainly the **Gardens of Villa Taranto**. Their origins date back to 1931 when a **Scottish gentleman**, Captain Neil Boyd McEacharn, archer of the Queen of England and Academician Linneano, bought, through an advertisement appeared in the Times, the property called "La Crocetta" setting itself the goal of transforming it in one of the main botanical complexes in the world, dedicating them to his Italian friend Taranto, to whom we owe the name of the Villa.

Captain McEacharn dedicated much of his life to the gigantic work, investing almost all of his vast personal wealth, and applying the considerable experience in floriculture already acquired with the creation of the vast park that surrounded his castle of Galloway in Scotland. The work involved over thirty years of work that required the participation of over one hundred workers for many years.

In September, in Verbania, the event of the flowery course has been taking place for decades: shaped wagons and covered with flowers of any type and color, creating true masterpieces. The carts towed by tractors parade through the city and are followed by many people passionate about the old traditions of the Verbano.

The natural vegetation in the hilly area is largely forest-like and can be classified into three types:

WOOD MIXED WITH LATIFOGLIE (BROADLEAF):

it is the most widespread in the area. The dominant tree species are the chestnut tree, flanked by **wild cherry, robinia, hazelnut** and to a lesser extent black alder. Black cherry (*Prunus Padus*) destroys robinia.

The mixed forest also includes the **strobe pine and spruce**; in some areas there are subjects of English oak and hornbeam, about 30 meters high and with a diameter of about 80-90 centimeters.

Some of the species mentioned indicate, with their presence, an appreciable naturalness of the wood. We also find some trees of exotic origin such as red oak, strobe pine and black locust; these three species are native to the United States of America where they grow in climates similar to ours. When a species is introduced into a new environment, and here it is able to settle and reproduce, it is said that it is naturalized, this is what has happened to these three species of plants that are now found everywhere in our woods.

ALNO-FRASSINETO:

it is present in areas with moist soils and stagnant water and is a forest mainly consisting of **black alder and ash**. In the undergrowth **the osmunda regalis**, rare and protected fern, grows; in spring there are widespread blooms of **crocus** albiflorus, **primula** vulgaris, **anemone** nemorosa, while now there are few specimens of spontaneous **cyclamen** (*Cyclamen purpurascens*; plant now protected) because up to a few decades ago, girls used to fill the baskets made with branches of hazeltree with these small but fragrant flowers, thus contributing to the disappearance.

MEADOW-PASTURE:

the pasture meadow is an old man-made forage crop with the plowing of the forest and the grassing of the land spontaneously. A few decades ago, hemp was grown and processed, a plant about two meters tall that was sown in April and harvested in August. Meadows are abundant and are still mowed once or twice a year. In the grasslands, they are: albiflorus crocus, *Avenella flexuosa*, *Luzula campestris*, *Urtica dioica* and many other species



Prunus avium

Home Gardens

In the various gardens adjacent to the houses you can see red and green maples, mimosas, birches, camellias, gardenias, azaleas and rhododendrons. In this area, camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons are very widespread and lush thanks to the acidity of the soil favorable to their development. There are several varieties of rhododendrons, so that already in 1852 there existed on the floral catalogs of F.lli Rovelli di Pallanza 84 varieties of these plants.



Cyclamen purpurascens

Historical aspects

Until a few decades ago, in the partly terraced lands, meadows and pastures were cultivated, enriched by fruit trees such as **apple and pear trees**, and the **vine** that was cultivated in two different ways was very widespread:

ad Alteni: which consisted of climbing the stem of the vine to other trees, or to specially planted poles; in Filare: on the terraced land in the shape of steps.

Even today if you walk through the woods you can find shoots of grapes.

A very important plant has been the **chestnut tree (*Castanea sativa*)** which for centuries has been the source of livelihood for the population not only in wartime.

The tree was called by the elders the "castègn"; of the plant was used all: the wood, both to burn in the chimneys and to build furniture, the dry foliage harvested in the fall to form the litter for cattle and goats, the fruit for food.

There were specific areas, dedicated to the cultivation of large chestnut plants grafted by large fruits.



Castanea sativa

Flowers of Lake Maggiore

Camellia japonica, *C. reticulata*, *C. x williamsii* and other hybrids

The camellia, native to China and Japan, has assumed a predominant role among the acidophilous plants in the West. There are many enthusiasts and hybridizers who began, since the nineteenth century, to create numerous local hybrids. It is a plant characterized by many colors and flower forms; the color ranges range from white to pink to red, often generating beautiful variegations and maculatures; the shapes are very variable from the simple or semi-double ones to the more complex ones like double imbricate, peoniform and anemoniform. Perfect for collecting: the nurserymen recommend "the rose of Japan" for cultivation both in pots and in the garden for hedges or isolated specimens. The period of flowering depends on the climatic zones: the most abundant period is between the end of February and the beginning of April. Very early varieties can begin to bloom even in December.



Winter camellia

Winter is traditionally a period not very rich in surprises and colors for lovers of nature and greenery. An exception is the winter camellia showing its blooms in the colder months. Always green as the other camellias, it can have a slender, compact but also almost creeping bearing. The flowers range from white to pink to red with different possibilities of nuances, the shape can be plain, double or semi-double. The winter camellia with its flowers that resist frost, gives the feeling of spring to every day clear and sunny, attracting, with their faint scent, the pollinating insects awakened for the occasion. Through a wise choice of varieties to be cultivated it will be possible to have a continuous flowering from September until February. The earliest varieties can begin to bloom in September-October, the later ones last until January-February.



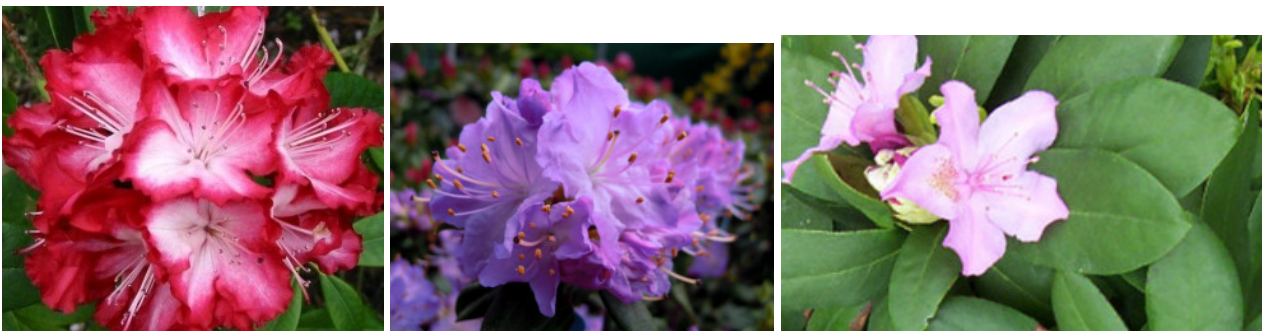
Azalea japonica, *Azalea indica*, *Azalea mollis*

A shrub of oriental origin, adapted to our climates since the nineteenth century, nowadays it possesses a vast quantity of varieties, made up of different species, from old cultivars of the lake and from recent Belgian and American hybrids. It is a rustic plant, very long-lived, and its reduced root system is ideal for growing in pots, but splendid for the formation of polychrome spots in parks and gardens. The production concerns shrubs, compact and very floriferous, with a very wide color range and a myriad of intermediate variations, also composed of variegations and margins of the petals. The classic and compact globe-shaped breeding form also varies with specimens grown in the shape of a pyramid or a sapling. The era of flowering depends on the climatic zones: the most abundant period is between April and May. There are early varieties that can flourish, at home, even during the winter.



Rhododendron (species and hybrids), *R. yakushmanum*

The genus *Rhododendron* is vast and composed of innumerable species and hybrids. Giant and centuries-old specimens, present along the shores of Lake Maggiore, are admired during the spring for the copious bloom and the pastel shades. The hybridization and genetic improvement works have led to a wide variety selection and guarantee a perfect setting as garden or potted plants. Large-flowered hybrids can take on a compact appearance (typical of *yakushmanum* hybrids), a dwarf posture or even a sapling-like form. Flowering is an amazing effluvia of colors: the thick head of individual flowers is tinged with intense and luminous shades. The most common color range is red, but there are also shades of pink, purple, purple, orange, white, yellow and blue-blue. The period of flowering depends on the climatic zones: the most abundant period is between the end of April and the beginning of June.



Pieris Japonica

The *Pieris* genus, composed of 10 species in all, comes from North America, the Himalayas, China and Japan, and was cultivated in gardens since the beginning of 1700. *Pieris japonica*, certainly the most widespread and common of the group, presents unique characteristics: the white or pink spring bloom, announced by a copious winter dripping, follows the new vegetation that, depending on the cultivated variety, takes on colors tending to fire red, yellow, orange or bronze. Plant rather resistant to frosts, it is also appreciated during the winter season. The time of flowering depends on the climatic zones: the most abundant flowering period is between the end of March and the beginning of April. The *pieris* are still appreciated even before the flowering for the abundant bunch of white buds present since January and especially for the new vegetation with bright colors during April-May.



Skimmia Japonica

It is a rather ductile species, appreciated for the garnet red cob grub in winter (as in the "Rubella" variety), for the fragrant flowering of other varieties or as a berry shrub (in the Revesian subspecies). Dioecious plant (ie that has only flowers or all male or all female blossoming on separate plants) and cultivable both outside and inside, prefers the shade and does not fear the cold. The flowering appears from late spring with colorful panicles and starry flowers that in autumn become reddish berries, very decorative and present throughout the winter. *Skimmia japonica* is part of acidophilus, plants that love to feed on acid soils and need to be periodically fertilized with appropriate products.



Kalmia Latifolia

Native to North America, it is the most cultivated species among the six existing ones. Always green bush up to 3-4 meters high with oval leaves, very coriaceous, bright dark green. It prefers in our climates the half-shade and the very loose soil, rich in humus and free from stagnation. It resists without problems to intense cold up to -15 / -20 ° C. It is one of the later flowering acidophilus (May and June) and the coryneal inflorescence is very attractive due to the diversity of the flowering colors closed to open, passing from red to pink to white. The shape and color of the flowers are very characteristic. The cultivation of *kalmia* has been introduced in the last 20 years and is a plant much appreciated by the most demanding customers. Flowering is very resistant to rain.



Hydrangea macrophylla, Hydrangea spp.

Deciduous bush from Japan, the hydrangea is very popular as a flowered pot plant thanks to the large hemispherical corymbs that bloom in late spring and early summer with white, pink, red and blue colors in acid soils. The production was very developed on Lake Maggiore in the 60s of the last century and was particularly successful due to the intense blue of the flowers, favored by the acidity of the cultivation land. In recent years local productions have specialized in the cultivation of medium and large size plants very rustic for a quick effect in the realization of gardens.



Plants in Vignola

In the meadows and woods of Vignola there are:

Taxodium Distichum (Swamp Cypress or Bald Cypress)
Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*)
Birch (*Betula*)
Chestnut grafted (*Castanea Sativa* - Marrone di Cuneo)
Buket de Betizac ("Marrone")
Sweet osmanthus, sweet olive, tea olive or fragrant olive - *Osmanthus Fragrans*
Azalea (*Azaleastrum rhododendron*)
Euonymus europaeus (spindle, European spindle, common spindle)
Kalmia latifolia (mountain laurel or calico-bush or spoonwood)
Maple (*Acer*)
Beech (*Fagus*)
Nandina (Sacred bamboo or heavenly bamboo)
Hazel (*Corylus avellana*, nisciör in Lombard)
Skimmia Japonica
Spruce (*Picea abies*)
Thuja (*Thuja*)
Tulip tree (*Liriodendron*)
Sweet gum (*Liquidambar*)
Persian ironwood (*Parrotia Persica*)
Japanese Medlar/ Loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*)
Apple tree (*Malus domestica*)
Cherry tree (Durone di Vignola- *Prunus avium*)
Bamboo (*Bambuseae*)
Siberian dogwood (*Cornus Alba Sibirica*)
Calicantus Praecox *Chimonanthus praecox*
Rhododendrons: hairy alpenrose or hairy rhododendron (*Rhododendron hirsutum*)
alpenrose, snow-rose, or rusty-leaved alpenrose (*Rhododendron ferrugineum*)
Monkey puzzle tree, monkey tail tree, or Chilean pine (*Araucaria araucana*)
Hydrangea or Hortensia
Buxus sempervirens (common box, European box, or boxwood)
Ficus pumila (creeping fig or climbing fig)
Ruscus aculeatus (butcher's-broom)
Helleborus niger, commonly called Christmas rose or black hellebore
Phlox
Lavender (*Lavandula*)
Photinia x fraseri
Blueberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*)
Vine (Isabella Grape - *Vitis labrusca*)
Rose (*Rosa*)

In the woods of Vignola:

Oak (*Quercus*), Ash (*Fraxinus*), Alder (*Alnus*, Uniscia in dialect), Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), Hazel tree (*Corylus avellana*), Medlar (*Mespilus Germanica*- Verìspur in Lombard), Birch (*Betula*), Walnut tree (The Latin name of the genus comes from the Latin *Iovis glans*: acorn of Jupiter, *Juglans regia*), Maple (*Acer Platanoides*), Palm Tree (*Chamaerops Excelsa*), Lily of the valley (*Convallaria majalis*), Yew, English yew or European yew (*Taxus Baccata*), *Ilex aquifolium* (holly, common holly, English holly, European holly, or occasionally Christmas holly), *Allium ursinum*

(ramsons, buckrams, wild garlic, broad-leaved garlic, wood garlic, bear leek, or bear's garlic), Oxalis acetosella (wood sorrel or common wood sorrel), Ferns (Polypodiopsida), Mulberry (Morus, Mürün in dialect)

In the woods of the stream (Valle di Brugo):

Camphor tree (Laurus Camphora), Robinia (Acacia, Robinia pseudoacacia), Chestnut tree (Castanea Sativa), Medlar (Mespilus Germanica- Verispur in dialect), Black Cherry (Prunus Avium), Yew (Taxus), Common Laurel (Prunus laurocerasus), Anemone nemorosa (wood anemone, windflower, thimbleweed, and smell fox), Primrose (Primula Vulgaris)

At Vignola entrance (parking):

Prunus Padus (Black cherry)

Mulberry (Morus)

Maple (Acer)

Crataegus navajo

Creeping rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis prostratus)

Juniper (Juniperus)

Abelia grandiflora

Loropetalum

Cotoneaster salicifolia repens horizontalis

Lonicera

Poppy, common poppy, corn poppy, corn rose, field poppy, Flanders poppy or red poppy (Papaver rhoeas)

Jasminum asiaticum or Trachelospermum asiaticum

Nandina (Sacred bamboo or heavenly bamboo)

Camellias

Near the swimming pool:

Oleander (Nerium oleander)

Lavender (Lavandula)

Nandina (Sacred bamboo or heavenly bamboo)

Hydrangea paniculata

Hypericum calycinum

Mesem bryanthemum

Abelia rupestris

Azalea (azaleastrum rhododendron)

Rhododendron (Rhododendron)

Corilopsis

Pieris

Camellia

Sweet osmanthus, sweet olive, tea olive or fragrant olive - Osmanthus Fragrans

Near the "Stagno delle Kalmie (Kalmias' Pond)":

Kalmia

Taxodium Distichum (Swamp Cypress or Bald Cypress)

Eichhornia crassipes, commonly known as common water hyacinth